

Baptist Identity: A Free Church in a Free Society
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One of the first things my pastor said to me after I surrendered to the ministry was "You need to get ahold of that Williams translation of the New Testament—it's done by a Baptist." And you could tell that it was done by a Baptist.

I'm honored to be here. I'm always delighted to come to Union University. I'm so delighted that things are going so well here. My oldest daughter graduated in the class of 1996 from Union. It was a good school then, and it's even better now. I am not at all surprised by the visionary leadership that Dr. Dockery has provided, but it is always good to have one's good judgment and good taste confirmed, and Dr. Dockery has been making me look good now for more than twenty years for having had the good sense to hire him as a professor at the Criswell College. He has gone on and done wonderful things, and I do believe that the best is yet to come for Union University.

And I believe the best is yet to come for Southern Baptists. We do face severe challenges, but we've faced severe challenges before. And it seems to me that we have more cause to be more optimistic than pessimistic as we enter the twenty-first century. I believe that we will look back on the first two decades of the twenty-first century and we will say that these have been the greatest decades yet in Southern Baptist life. I truly believe that. I tell you—I don't know how you could think otherwise when you're exposed to the students on our seminary campuses. I have the opportunity to be on almost all of our seminary campuses on a regular basis, and I am telling you that our seminaries are being provided by our churches with students and are being trained by our seminaries to go out and not be occupation troops but SEAL teams, and to be those Green Berets who are going to go behind enemy lines and take new territory. They are, indeed, committed. They are sold out to the Lord Jesus Christ. As a baby boomer, I am awed by their commitment, by their dedication, and by their willingness to go forth and sacrifice for our Savior.

Well, I am also part of the tribe that has been described as Southern Baptists of the 1950s and the 1960s. I know this strains credulity, but I was a Sunbeam. In fact, I preached at the First Baptist Church in Houston about a year ago now, and after I had finished an elderly lady, and you'll know why I say "elderly" when I tell you what she said to me—she walked up and she said "Richard, I am Dorothy Elam." And when she told me who she was I knew who she was, because she kicked me out of Sunbeams. She said "I was your first Sunbeam teacher, and you were a pill." Well, I've been told this on numerous occasions. Complete strangers have come up to me and reminded me of being expelled from junior camp and—I got kicked out of Vacation Bible School and my mother was the superintendent. But I was a Sunbeam; I was a Royal Ambassador. I came from one of those Baptist families that believed if the church was having an event it was your spiritual duty to be there. I've been to every mosquito-infested youth encampment that Texas Baptists keep on the Gulf Coast; I dated GAs. I even dated a couple of

queens with scepters, and I'm married to a woman who's the daughter, the granddaughter, the great-granddaughter, the niece, now the wife, and mother of Baptist preachers.

I really am grateful for my Southern Baptist heritage. I was reared in a Southern Baptist home, in a Southern Baptist church, and I must say that the church I grew up in—in fact, this Sunday, this Easter Sunday, will be the fifty-first anniversary of my baptism. I was baptized Easter Sunday, 1953. I was six and a half years old, and—there's been a lot of abuse in the past, baptizing small children without making certain they knew what they were doing. But I would plead with you, don't ever overestimate what a child can understand, but don't underestimate it, either. I knew I was a sinner, and I knew I needed to be saved when I was six and a half years old. In fact, I don't know if anyone has ever embraced the doctrine of salvation by grace with more alacrity than did I, because I knew at six and a half I was never going to make it on works salvation.

I had never really thought about it, but I was introduced at a right-to-life rally by a Roman Catholic in the upwoods part of Michigan about three weeks ago. It was a medical doctor, and he said "I'm going to introduce Dr. Land by reading parts of the preface from his book *For Faith and Family*, because I think it says who he is." I had never really thought about it that way, but in this particular context, talking about a free church in a free society, I want to do somewhat the same thing.

I grew up in a devout Christian home in a working class neighborhood in a 1950s Houston. I'm the first person in my family to go to college. I'm very grateful for that traditional upbringing, which taught me many and valuable foundational truths. First, I learned that the Christian faith is not a religion, but a personal relationship between Jesus and each individual who trusts him as Lord and Savior.

Second, I learned that the Bible was God's holy word, fully authoritative, without mistake or error, and sufficient for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. I didn't know what the word "inerrant" was until I got to college, but I was taught an inerrant Bible when I was a mere youth.

Unfortunately, growing up in Baptist churches of that era, I was also taught that Baptists believed in a spiritual gospel that did not deal with social issues, with certain exceptions, you know. Liquor and gambling. To get involved in social issues was considered a violation of separation of church and state. Of course, that was when we were in our racial Babylonian captivity. This church, this tribe, by the way, that we remember with such affection, was an all-white tribe. No persons of color need apply. Fortunately for me, I was always taught, growing up, that racial prejudice was not only wrong, it was sinful, and that I should never treat someone as less than myself because of the color of their skin. But, of course, that didn't keep us from living in a segregated neighborhood and going to a segregated school and attending a segregated church. Thank God we've been liberated from that.

As Dr. Mohler so accurately pointed out, we still don't fit the demographic reality of the country, but we've made extraordinary strides with intentionality and with great cost in the last twenty years. Southern Baptists have gone from being a virtually all white denomination, by choice, in 1970, to being a denomination that at present has twenty percent of its church membership made up of people who are ethnic—black, Hispanic, Asian, and other.

Roman Catholics, who never had the same intentionality about being racially exclusive, only have twenty-three percent. We've gone from zero to twenty in about twenty-five years. That is a significant demographic revolution. It is a significant spiritual revolution, and it at least gets us onto the launching pad for what should be our goal—practicing colorblind evangelism in

every nook and cranny of the United States until our church membership reflects the demographic reality of the nation. And I don't want to hear any of this nonsense about "Well, we have different worship traditions. We have a different sermon tradition. We have a different music tradition." A lost person doesn't have a worship tradition. A lost person doesn't have a church music tradition. And if we go out and win the lost to Jesus, they're going to sing a lot like we sing, and they're going to hear preaching a lot like our preaching. We need to be about the business of winning people to Jesus and putting the truth to what I was taught, which was—what was it?—"Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight. Jesus loves the little children of the world." That means the little children of our neighborhoods, and our inner cities, too.

Over the years since then, I have learned better. I now understand that Christ's command to be salt and light demands that as his disciples we go out into the society and seek to make a difference for what is right and good. I now have a better perspective.

Growing up in Texas with a fifth-generation Texas father who still sounds like Lyndon Johnson—says "rench" and "pench" and "ench" and "iice" and "riice" and "niice"—and a mother from Boston, Massachusetts, which qualifies me as bicultural, I received a unique gift. I got Texas with perspective. I got this wonderful, never-give-up heritage of the Alamo and the sheer possibility of things from big sky country with a Bostonian mother whispering in my ear that biggest was not always best, and loudest was not always wisest. Perspective. Just so, I've learned to understand the tremendous, born-again personal salvation foundation of the Christian faith with a vitally important additional perspective—the command of that savior for each of us to go forth and be salt and light in society.

My assigned topic is "A Free Church in a Free Society." And that is the beginning of things for us as Baptists—a free church. Now, in actual fact, we have three articles in our Baptist Faith and Message that deal with the three broad issues that I want us to examine this afternoon. The first is the church.

I used to play a little trick on my students at the Criswell College. I taught a required course called "Baptist Distinctives," and I started off by saying "How many of you believe that belief in the inerrancy of the Bible is a Baptist distinctive." They all raised their hands. And I'd say "Well, that would be real news to John Calvin and Martin Luther and Huldreich Zwingli, not to mention B. B. (Orfield?). Baptists have, in almost all places, in almost all times, given unwavering commitment to the full authority and accuracy of scripture. All scripture is given by God. It is a perfect treasure. But what separates us from most of our Christian brethren and has separated us from the beginning, is our doctrine of the church. The article on the church separates us from almost everybody. A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Well, when you start saying a "New Testament church," you know our forefathers went to jail, and sometimes worse, telling both their Catholic and Protestant persecutors they wouldn't be bound by proof texts fetched from the Old Testament. We lived in the New Covenant, a New Testament, in the blood of Christ. And the manual for faith and practice for believers in the New Covenant was the New Testament. A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous, local congregation.

Well, that separates us from all those who have synods and all of those who have bishops and all of those who have presbyteries, and then of baptized believers. That separates us from Congregationalists, it separates us from a lot of the Bible churches. Associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel, observing the two ordinances of Christ, governed by his laws, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by his word, and seeking to

extend the gospel to the ends of the Earth. Each congregation operates under the lordship of Christ through democratic processes.

I have so much fun dealing with reporters. You know, it really is fun, most of the time. They call me up and they say "Well aren't you worried about the Baptist General Convention of Texas cutting you out of the budget?" I said "No. The Baptist General Convention of Texas has had its vote, and now each individual congregation of Southern Baptists in Texas will have its vote, and I know what the Baptist General Convention of Texas has seemed to have forgotten. Almost all the churches in Texas, that are Baptist churches, see themselves as Southern Baptist churches first, not Texas Baptist churches." We are getting more money now from the Baptists of Texas than we got before we were completely defunded by the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

Each church decides for itself whether it wants to be a Southern Baptist church. One of the things we seem to have often forgotten is that every Baptist associational group is autonomous, and it decides for itself with whom it will fellowship and with whom it will not. Each association is autonomous. It decides which churches it will have within its association and which ones it won't, by a democratic process.

And the state convention makes its decision without regard to what the association says. It's so much fun to try to explain to a *New York Times* reporter that all organizational structure in Southern Baptist life is horizontal, and that the headquarters of the Southern Baptist Convention is the local church. We are run by forty thousand-plus Southern Baptist churches. They decide how much they're going to give to the Cooperative Program, how much they're going to allot as a goal for their mission offerings, and how they are going to allocate the money that is entrusted to them. And they remind us periodically that they will decide how they're going to do it.

Then, the state. Because really this is a three-fold issue. It's the church, the state, and society, and the state and the society are different. We have an article on the church and the state. It's called religious liberty—Article XVII. "God alone is the Lord of the conscience, and he has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are contrary to his word or not contained in it." Church and state should be separate. The state owes to every church protection and full freedom in the pursuit of its spiritual ends. In providing for such freedom, no ecclesiastical group or denomination should be favored by the state more than others. Civil government, being ordained by God, it is the duty of Christian to render loyal obedience thereto in all things not contrary to the revealed will of God. The church should not resort to the civil power to carry on its work. The church should not resort to the civil power to carry on its work. The last thing we should ever want is government-sponsored religion. It's like getting embraced by a python. It squeezes all the life out of you and you fall over dead. Just look at the empty cathedrals of Europe. It's our privilege, our duty, our obligation, and our responsibility to preach, teach, and spread the gospel, not the government's. We shouldn't seek the government's assistance; we shouldn't accept the government's assistance because, unless you're the National Endowment for the Arts, which seems to be the single exception to the rule, with the government's shekels sooner or later come the government's shackles.

Now when we as believers win people to Jesus and we disciple them and they begin to come to a new core set of values, and they begin to understand, from a new spiritual perspective, the truths and values of life and what should be done and what shouldn't be done in society, they have a right, and we have a right, as citizens, to bring our convictions to bear on public policy.

Now it says here that the gospel of Christ contemplates spiritual means alone for the pursuit of its ends. The state has no right to impose penalties for religious opinions of any kind.

The state has no right to oppose taxes for the support of any form of religion. A free church, in a free state, is the Christian ideal, and this implies the right of free and unhindered access to God on the part of all men, and the right to form and propagate opinions in the sphere of religion without interference by the civil power. Without interference by the civil power.

Now we've heard what the Baptists say about the church, we've heard what Baptists say about the church and the state; how about the Christian and the church and society? Well, that's settled in Article XV. I was amazed the first time I read this. I don't think I ever heard one sermon about Article XV the whole time I was growing up in Baptist churches. All Christians are under obligation to seek to make the will of Christ supreme in our own lives and in human society. Means and methods used for the improvement of society and the establishment of righteousness among men can be truly and permanently helpful only when they are rooted in the regeneration of the individual by the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ.

In the spirit of Christ, Christians should oppose racism. That was added in 2000. It should have been in the 1963 convention—message, the Baptist Faith and Message, but it would have been hard to get it passed then. Every form of greed, selfishness, and vice, and all forms of sexual immorality including adultery, homosexuality, and pornography. Now we added, in 2000, all forms of—we added "including adultery, homosexuality and pornography." Had Baptists changed their minds about those issues since 1963? No. But many Americans had. And one of the functions of a confession of faith is not only to teach our own people what we believe but to speak and witness to society about what we believe is grievous immorality. And we as Baptists made it clear that we believe that homosexuality is immoral. It is against God's will, as is adultery, as is pornography.

We should work to provide for the orphan, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, the sick. We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death. That was added in 2000. Why? Because we weren't killing babies every twenty seconds in 1963. We are today; we have been for 31 years. Baptists have been outraged by it.

I think that Dr. Mohler is absolutely right. He and I have talked about this before. The moderates and the liberals—and there is a difference—the moderates and the liberals never have really understood the degree to which the abortion issue drove the debate in the Southern Baptist Convention. When Southern Baptists were appalled by the tidal wave of blood—innocent blood—that engulfed the nation after the Roe v Wade decision, and they found out that their agencies and institutions were sometimes ambiguous and sometimes, unfortunately not ambiguous, about a woman's right to kill her unborn baby, they were shocked, they were embarrassed, and they were galvanized to action.

Every Christian should seek to bring industry, government and society as a whole under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth, and brotherly love. In order to promote these ends, Christians should be ready to work with all men of good will in any good cause, always being careful to act in the spirit of love without compromising their loyalty to Christ and his truth.

There are the three pillars—the church, the state, and society—that I want to address in the time remaining to me. The beginning point, the impetus, is the Baptist understanding of the biblical nature of the church and ultimately its relationship to the state or the _____.

Beginning in the sixteenth century, (Grable and Marpek and Hubbire and Manz ???) known as the Swiss Brethren and later as the Anabaptists, they struck at the very foundation of Western civilization for over a thousand years when they separated church membership from

membership in the society. In that society your baptismal certificate was your birth certificate, and they were saying "We're not going to allow our children to be baptized." The Constantinian synthesis had so warped the Western Christian understanding of the church and its relationship to the state that even spiritual giants like Calvin and Luther and Zwengli couldn't comprehend the church and the state not being in tandem and unison together. The idea of a visible, gathered assembly of born-again believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, baptized by immersion as an act of testimony and obedience, being the church, and it not having any connection to, or relationship to, or subservience to the state, was literally beyond the cognitive grid of John Calvin and Martin Luther. Just look at Geneva, and look at Luther's Germany.

And it was beyond the cognitive grid of most of the Protestant reformers in Britain for many, many, many years. The Puritans, they wanted to "purify" the Church of England of the remaining vestiges of popery. They still wanted a state church, they just wanted a "pure" state church.

We've heard a lot about the 1950s. I'm the same age as George W. Bush and Bill Clinton and Laura Bush. In fact, in July of 1946 George W. Bush was born, in August of 1946 Bill Clinton was born, and in November of 1946 Laura Bush and I were born, and three of the four of us are adults. One of the experiences of being a school age child in the mid-1950s is that they were going to give all of us dog tags—identification tags—so that when the nuclear attack came they could identify the cinders. You know, the old "duck and tuck." It was well known in Houston that we were five miles from one of the top five targets of the Soviet missile system, the oil refineries in eastern Houston and Pasadena. So we knew that if there was ever a nuclear exchange, duck and tuck wasn't going to do us much good. But they sent home a form to have your dog tag made. It had to have your name and your address, and they wanted to put your religion. And this was a simpler time in America; we had three choices: Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish. Well, my mother was raised on the trail of blood. She knows better now, but back then she still believed in the trail of blood. "We're not Protestants. I'm not going to put down Protestant. I'm not going to let your little brother and you have 'P' on your dog tag. You're not Protestants. You're Baptists." So she went down to see the principal, and she said "I want my boys to have 'B' for Baptist." Well, we got a "P" for Protestant. And you know, I think the best term for Baptist is "Completed Protestant." The impetus of the Protestant Reformation was to get back to the primitive pattern of the New Testament church. Well, guess what. We're the only ones who didn't fall off the wagon along the way. We made it all the way back. And, you know, just take every church in the New Testament. You drop it down in the middle of West Tennessee and you say "Now this is the church," and you describe the church, and you say "now what kind of a church is that?" And they say "That's a Baptist church." Except for the church at Corinth. And they say "Well, it used to be a Baptist church but it got kicked out of the association for speaking in tongues."

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...back to England for saying the Church of England's ministers were not true ministers and you shouldn't hear them, and the Church of England was not a true church and you shouldn't go there, and—he says we don't own the land because we got it by patent from the king and didn't pay the Indians for it. Roger Williams. Champion of separation of church and state. Up to his eyeballs

in the most controversial social issue, public policy issue of the day, the colonists' shameful treatment of Native Americans, and he was on the right side. He said "We don't own this land. What gave us the right to take this land from the Indians? We need to pay them for it." Roger Williams, when he founded Providence Plantation, founded the first government anywhere in the Western world for over a millennium where you were free not only to worship as you please without fear of penalty, but free to stay home and shuck peas on the front porch on Sunday morning without fear of government interference. It took that long.

And even then the victory wasn't won. The Puritan revolution in England foundered on this issue of the church and the state. They were united in what they didn't want. They didn't want a king trying to rule by divine right, and they didn't want an Episcopal church with bishops. Once they got rid of the king, and once they got rid of the bishops, they couldn't decide what was going to take its place. In fact, they sat down for six weeks in Putney, in England, and had a debate about it. I had to read all twenty-three volumes of the manuscripts in seventeenth-century handwriting. They were casual spellers.

A debate within Cromwell's army about what was going to be the settlement of the church, because the Presbyterians, who made up about half of his army, they wanted a Presbyterian state church. The Congregationalists a Presbyterian Congregational state church that would let Baptists who wanted to be part of it. And the Baptists, who made up about half of his army, said "We don't want a state church at all. We want an England where the church is made up of a visible, gathered, covenanted community of saints who have been baptized by immersion and the government doesn't sponsor or give favoritism to the church." And it is that rock upon which the Puritan revolution foundered.

Even in the American colonies, two-thirds of the original thirteen states had tax-supported, official state churches. None of them were Baptist. In New England they were Congregational. In the South they were Episcopal, and in the middle colonies they tended to be Presbyterian. Indeed, in the ten years prior to the American Revolutionary War, we have documented over five hundred Baptist preachers who were thrown in jail by the Episcopal government authorities of Virginia for "disturbing the peace." Now that's not the worst definition of preaching I've ever heard, disturbing the peace, but what the authorities meant was they were preaching without a license from the government to do so, and Leland and the others said "We don't need a license from the government—we've got a license from Jesus and the church."

Well, in spite of many of the hardships, the Baptist view triumphed, at least at the federal level, in the American Constitution. You know well the story of John Leland and the Baptists and their role in the ratification of the Constitution. The Baptists, in spite of persecution, had reached the place where they were the balance of power in several states, particularly Virginia. Leland cut a political deal. That's right. A Baptist evangelist cutting a political deal. Cut a political deal whereby he would withdraw his opposition, would do what he could to get Baptists to vote for ratification and James Madison promised the first congress of that new government they would pass an amendment to the Constitution that would guarantee that Congress shall make no law affecting an establishment of religion nor interfering with the free exercise thereof. And that's what happened. The First Amendment is really the codification and the triumph at the federal level of the Baptist view of the church and its relationship to the state. There will be no national establishment of religion. Government is not going to get into the religion business. And the government is not going to interfere with the free exercise of religion.

Please note that all the restrictions in the First Amendment are on the government—not on Christians, not on churches. It's the government that is restricted in the sphere of religion in the First Amendment—not the people, and not religion.

Now you note that it says "Congress shall make no law affecting an establishment of religion. Nine of the states had tax-supported state churches. Some of them didn't get rid of their tax-supported state churches until 1832. In 1832 the last two, too dead to skin, established state churches, finally were declared dead and disestablished in Massachusetts and Connecticut. 1832.

Now sometimes when I recite this history people say to me "Well, if that's the case, and only the federal government is restricted from having an establishment of religion and interfering with the free exercise thereof, then how come we don't have a state Mormon church in Utah? Well, the reason is, the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which has been determined by the Supreme Court for well more than a century to say, in effect, that what the federal government is forbidden from doing in the first ten amendments, all government is forbidden from doing. Government shall make no law affecting an establishment of religion, nor interfering with the free exercise thereof. Now there are some who want to pretend the Fourteenth Amendment was never passed. And there are some who would like to do away with the application of the Fourteenth Amendment to the states. That's a really bad idea. The best defense that people of faith have today in the judicial system is the free exercise clause of the First Amendment. Weakened as it has been by the Supreme Court in the Smith decision, it is still the best defense we have.

In Connecticut a zoning commission, and I would just say with all respect, "Lord, deliver us from zoning commissions." A zoning commission told a couple they could not have a Bible study of more than ten people in their own home because it would cause parking problems and traffic congestion. They lost, in state court; they won, against the zoning commission in federal court, based on the First Amendment's guarantee of no governmental interference with the free exercise of religion.

In the Northwest, we have had churches where zoning commissions have said "You can only build an auditorium of a certain size, no bigger, and you can only have a certain number of worship services at a certain number of specified times on Sundays because otherwise it would interfere with traffic flow." They have won—not in state court, but in federal court—based on the First Amendment which says "no governmental interference with the free exercise of religion."

If we were somehow to give a lobotomy to the majority of the present Supreme Court and they were to reverse their understanding of the Fourteenth Amendment, religious freedom would be severely diminished in the United States. Not in Tennessee, not in Alabama, where we're big enough to protect ourselves, but in California, in Michigan, in New York, in Connecticut, our fellow believers would have their rights severely damaged and trampled upon by an increasingly hostile secular majority.

Now at the time that the First Amendment was ratified, the religious, cultural, and political situations were completely different than they are today. The great depth and diversity of religious conviction and belief in the early days of the federal republic produced the First Amendment because as Michael McConnell has said, "Every religion was a minority religion in some part of the new United States of America." There was no ability to have a majority religion because there were too many of them. As Michael McConnell, the constitutional scholar, has said, and I'm quoting now, "The First Amendment's clauses were not intended as an instrument

of secularization or as a weapon that the non-religious or anti-religious could use to suppress the effusions of the religious. The religion clauses were intended to guarantee the rights of those whose religious practices seemed to the majority a little odd." "Enthusiastic" was the word often used to describe the Baptists of that day, with much the same meaning that we would use for charismatic or fanatical today.

First Amendment religion clauses were there to protect minorities, religious minorities, of which Baptists were one, in most parts of the country, at the time of the ratification of the First Amendment. The majority may not trample upon the minority's right to religious expression and freedom. It was never intended by our first founding fathers to be freedom from religion, but freedom for religion.

I have a story in my book that explains this. We have all heard about the famous, or infamous letter from Thomas Jefferson to the Baptist preachers of Danbury, Connecticut. Now remember, those dear brothers were suffering under the discrimination of a state church—not a federal church, but a state Congregational church they all had to pay taxes to and that got a favored position vis a vis all other religions, all other denominations, in Connecticut. Thomas Jefferson said "Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between a man and his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legislative powers of government reach actions only and not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declare that their legislators should make no law respecting the establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, thus building a wall of separation between the church and state." He was talking about a wall of separation between any institutional connection between the church and the state. He was not talking about a separation of religious belief, opinion, and expression from public life and public policy.

Let me give you the immediate context of that letter. John Leland, as you know, you've heard, great Baptist evangelist from New England, came to Virginia, spent more than two decades in Virginia, went back to his native Massachusetts in 1791. In his valedictory sermon made a statement that almost found its way into the Baptist Faith and Message. It sounds like it, anyway. He said "I believe that the preaching which is most blessed of God is the preaching of the sovereignty of God mixed with a little of what we would call Armenianism and the two can be tolerably well reconciled." That sounds an awful lot like "Election is the gracious purpose of God according to which he regenerates, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies sinners. It is consistent with the free agency of man and comprehends all the means of connection with ____." Sounds like the Southern Baptists were listening to John Leland.

Leland went back to Massachusetts, got far more involved in politics than I think a Baptist preacher should. Was very much involved in the election campaign of 1800—the nastiest, most caustic, most controversial election campaign in the history of the United States, which resulted in Thomas Jefferson, by the narrowest of margins, becoming the President. Leland was so much identified with his old friend Jefferson that when the Democrats of Western Massachusetts wanted to give a gift of gratitude and a gift showing their affection for their President, Thomas Jefferson, they asked John Leland to be the head of the delegation. A multi-hundred pound cheese was made. Some people say six hundred pounds, some people say a thousand pounds; it was big! The hauled it by wagon down to Washington D.C., and on New Year's Day, 1802, Leland called on President Jefferson at the White House and presented him with a gift of this cheese. He reassured the President that no Federalist cows had contributed any milk to this cheese—only Democrat cows.

He presented Jefferson with a gift of the cheese, he prayed for the President, he praised the President, prayed for God's blessing on the President, and then the delegation left. Jefferson went back into the White House and had lunch. It is not recorded whether he had any of the cheese. That afternoon, after John Leland, Baptist preacher, showed up that morning, that afternoon he wrote the letter to the churches, the Baptist ministers of Danbury, Connecticut. On Friday afternoon. Sunday morning Thomas Jefferson went to a worship service in the House of Representatives where John Leland, Baptist preacher, preached a sermon from the speaker's rostrum of the House of Representatives.

One of the Federalist congressmen who was there and was much irritated, said "Jefferson, that great reprobate who never came, came to the worship service this Sunday to hear this untutored frontier preacher preach in his holy whine." Obviously, Thomas Jefferson saw no contradiction with his understanding of a wall of separation of church and state with religious services, voluntary religious services, being held in the House of Representatives, from the speaker's rostrum, a sermon being preached with the President of the United States sitting on the front pew.

Unfortunately, the society in which we have been called to live is much more hostile to religion than the eighteenth century, and we have a judicial establishment that has done its best to turn the First Amendment on its head, to say that the First Amendment means "freedom from religion." The right of Americans not to hear religious opinions they don't want to hear. As Stephen Carter put it in his book *God is a Hobby*, I'd recommend all of you read it—professor of Yale University Law School—he says "Our culture has a secular bias that holds not only that religious beliefs cannot serve as the basis of policy, they cannot even be debated in the form of public dialog. Religion is like building model airplanes—it's another hobby. Something quaint, something trivial, not really fit activity for intelligent, public-spirited adults."

America's secularizing society seeks to say that it is all right to believe—we have freedom of conscience; you can believe what you like—but you ought to keep it to yourself, and you don't have the right to bring it into the public square. That is dangerous nonsense. Every great social evil in our history that has been corrected has been corrected because people of religious conviction brought their religious convictions to bear on public policy.

Now here's the way it's supposed to work. We have the right to preach the gospel. When people get saved, and their lives get changed, and their attitude and their understanding get changed, they have the right to bring their religious convictions to bear on public policy as private citizens, and if we convince enough of them that we are right, we have the right to make those moral convictions law. That's not called a theocracy; it's called the democratic process. And the other side had better get used to it, because we're not going away.

Now, I've got to tell you, I'm optimistic. I know, people say "You're optimistic?" Yes, I'm optimistic. I was interviewed by a reporter who was doing a book at Southern Seminary. He interviewed me in the cafeteria of Southern Seminary and said "I just spent three hours with Dr. Mohler yesterday, and he says you're a lot more optimistic than he is. Why is that? You're looking at the same set of facts." I said "Well, part of it may be biochemical. I don't worry when I should. I'm just pretty optimistic. I've never had a headache in my life. My wife says I'm a carrier—I give 'em. Part of it may have to do with age. Al Mohler was born in 1959. He was graduating from college, Ronald Reagan was elected President. When I was graduating from college in 1968, the country was coming apart. Remember? Dr. King was assassinated, Senator Kennedy was assassinated, we had race riots, we had people marching across the campus of my

college with enemy flags—remember?" It's a whole lot better now than it was then. And, I believe that this is the Baptist moment.

Barry Hankins, in his book, you know, talked about—he did a play in words from *At Ease in Zion*. Rufus Spain's *At Ease in Zion*. Southern Baptists were a regional people, we were at ease in Zion, and he wrote a book called *Uneasy in Babylon*. I'd recommend it to all of you. He says Southern Baptists are now a national denomination and we're not defined by our culture, we're defined by theology. Southern Baptist leaders today are not certain that this culture can be turned around, but they're pretty certain that if it's going to be turned around, they're the ones that are going to do it. And by "the ones" he doesn't mean Baptist leaders, he means the Baptist people.

I believe this is the Baptist moment. America and the world will not get the proper balance of separation of church and state right without our articulation of our heritage as Baptists. And I believe that if we are willing to be the salt and the light that we have been commanded to be by the Lord Jesus Christ, I believe that it is possible that we can turn this culture around. We need to certainly be salt and light and leave the results up to the Lord. I am a pre-tribulation premillennialist. As you know, that means that the world is going to be in really sorry shape as described by Revelation 4 onward until the Lord comes back. But there's nothing in my Bible that tells me that we can't have another Reformation first.

I believe it's possible. It's not possible if we don't believe it's possible. Yes, we're on the outside, but we can change this culture. In some ways we already have changed this culture. We can change this culture more. Do you know that the highest percentage of voters that are pro-life are eighteen to thirty-one year olds? That's right. Far more pro-life than their parents and their grandparents.

I had a *New York Times* reporter say well "How can that be?" and I said "It's easy. Pro-lifers had their babies and they raised them. Pro-aborts killed theirs and didn't raise them." Sixty-one percent of Americans—American women—now believe that *Roe v Wade* was wrong and that there needs to be severe restrictions on abortions.

We can win when we engage the culture with uncompromising Biblical truth. Our task is to engage the culture with uncompromising Biblical truth and leave the results to the providence of God.

God bless you, and God bless America.